



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF HONORABLE FLOYD D. SPENCE

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING WITH EUCOM, CENTCOM, AND SOUTHCOM CINCS

Wednesday, March 19, 1997

This morning the committee continues its hearings with our regional commanders-in-chief to receive testimony on their military requirements and to assess the impact of the Fiscal Year 1998 defense budget request on their respective missions. Before we begin, I would like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for being here.

We are pleased to have with us here today:

- General George A. Joulwan, Commander in Chief of the U.S. European Command;
- General J. H. Binford Peay, III, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Central Command; and
- General Wesley K. Clark, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Southern Command.

Gentlemen, I can remember a time when America was not a global power, when the British Navy was celebrated in Hollywood films for keeping the world's oceans safe, and the British Army for protecting Western civilization wherever it was threatened. Our own Navy and Army were small by comparison. Americans generally were content to mind their own the business here at home and leave the challenges of world politics and military competition to Britain and the other great powers.

Two world wars — World War II and the Cold War — changed all that. History turned a page, and for a number of reasons the mantle of leadership of the western world fell on the shoulders of the United States.

With the fall of the Berlin wall, the United States has become the world's sole superpower. Yet, I am deeply concerned that we are neglecting the very military forces — their readiness, their quality of life, and their modernization — on which the protection and promotion of our global interests in times of both peace and war so often depends. Testimony before this committee by numerous service representatives increasingly makes the same point — today's smaller force is being asked to do more with less. They salute, and they try. But in so doing, budgets, forces, and training are being stretched too thin.

In Europe, the United States and its allies have imposed an uneasy peace on Bosnia. New allies may soon join NATO in Central and Eastern Europe, possibly doubling the geographic size of the alliance, and greatly expanding U.S. security commitments and financial burdens. Russia, still armed with thousands of nuclear weapons, remains adamantly opposed to NATO expansion, and is only a heartbeat away from a new political leadership that may be hostile to the West.

In the Middle East, Saddam Hussein continues his brutal reign while he rebuilds his military forces. Despite years of U.N. inspections, Saddam appears to have preserved his programs to develop weapons of mass destruction. Iran, the world's leading sponsor of international terrorism, also is pursuing weapons of mass destruction and missile delivery systems that can threaten our forces and allies in the region. Terrorism threatens the stability of some of our allies in the Persian Gulf, and poses an immediate danger to the lives of our troops, as demonstrated by the tragic bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia.

Looking south, the drug empires of Central and South America are slowly poisoning the United States and they threaten the sovereignty of friendly states in the region. Cash-starved Russia is selling sophisticated aircraft, more advanced than any previously introduced in the region, with unpredictable consequences for the regional balance of power and U.S. security interests. Terrorists continue trying to undermine the stability of several friendly governments and at this moment still hold the Japanese Embassy in Peru hostage. Perhaps overshadowing all is the possible implosion of Cuba when Castro passes, or is forced, from the scene. No one knows when the Castro regime will fall. But when it does, a heavily armed Cuba could engage in behavior that would have significant consequences for the U.S.

We owe it to our men and women in uniform to see that they are better trained, equipped, supplied, and protected than any of their potential adversaries. I do not suspect that any of our witnesses disagree. Yet I believe that we are beginning to let the troops down. And if I am right, our actions and our inactions will have far-reaching implications for our nation's interests in all regions of the world as we head into the 21st century.

Gentlemen, you each face significant challenges so I look forward to your testimony. Before proceeding however, let me yield to the committee's Ranking Democrat, Mr. Dellums, for any remarks he may have.